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# MESSAGE FROM AMERICANS ABROAD TO AMERICANS AT HOME

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# MESSAGE FROM AMERICANS ABROAD TO AMERICANS AT HOME

FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN :

It is often said that Americans staying abroad lose their right to counsel those living at home, since foreign residence directly affects their opinions and sympathies. The latter part of this statement is true; but we should also remember that residence abroad gives many opportunities of observation and that those who follow the course of events close at hand are in a better position to get direct impressions of fact upon which adequate conclusions can be based.

While, therefore, not at all concealing our sympathies, we the undersigned Americans at present abroad, venture to present certain considerations on the war to you, our fellow-countrymen. We speak for hundreds of our fellow-citizens abroad, who share our views.

## I.—NEUTRALITY

In the first place, we consider moral neutrality impossible; for it is the attitude of one who either refuses to obtain knowledge or fails to act on his knowledge. In either case certain disastrous effects follow.

This attitude results in placing all the parties to the controversy, whether innocent or guilty, on the same footing. There is no discrimination between the bad and the good : as, for example, between the Germans' and the Allies' methods of conducting submarine warfare, or between the Germans' and the Allies' treatment of the neutrality of Belgium. To say that all the powers have "gone mad" is to do infinite injustice to devastated Belgium and to invaded France.

Another result is that the moral sympathies are dried up and the conscience blunted. We feel that the official counsel of neutrality made by the Administration at the outset of the war had these effects.

Such neutrality, further, does violence to American ideals. Americans of all people cannot be content to remain ignorant of the causes and effects of such a world conflagration or, understanding them, fail to sympathise with those who are fighting for ideals identical with their own.

We do not ask you to take sides because you are Anglo-Saxon, or French, or Slav, but because the facts are so clear and the principles at stake so important that their appreciation carries with it the duty of allegiance to one side and the right to condemn the other.

We see in Americans—we feel it in ourselves—the lamentable effects of two years of constrained neutrality. The country has been again and again galvanised by a message which seemed to promise a vigorous policy, only to fall back into indifference when a compromise had been effected in the interest of neutrality. What seemed to be clarion calls of liberty and justice have died away in the rumble of commercial wheels and the clang of factory bells. The public heart has been seared by a weak and ineffective diplomacy, and the public conscience dulled to the charge of commercialism. The statement that the United States stands for the " rights of humanity " excites everywhere, in Germany no less than in England and France, a melancholy or ironical smile. No satisfaction has yet been secured for the murder of Americans on the *Lusitania*.

We, Americans equally with you, deplore this degradation of the popular conscience, this blunting of the nation's sensibility. For this reason we seek to inform ourselves as to the facts and then to examine our hearts as to our duty.

In considering the case judicially, we find two relatively distinct topics forced upon us : first the war itself considered as a European conflict, and second, its repercussion upon the United States.

## II.—THE MEANING OF THE WAR

There is place here only for a summary of the conclusions to which careful study has led us.

As to the immediate causes of the war the following statements are fully proved by diplomatic records and official reports.

England entered the war only after hesitation up to the last minute and only when every diplomatic resource was exhausted. The German march into Belgium was the deciding factor in British opinion and the immediate cause of British action. The British were absolutely unprepared for war, except on the side of the navy, which was at its customary plane of efficiency.

Can we blame England for honouring her signature to the guarantee of Belgian neutrality ?

France acted purely on the defensive, being exposed to attack as the ally of Russia. The official German charge, that French aeroplanes dropped bombs on German territory—on the railway lines near Nüremberg—on the second of August, 1914, has now been declared unfounded by the editor Schwalbe (1), who spread the original report. Those who have lived in France during the last decade know—and have fully demonstrated—the pacific attitude of the French, even toward the Germans, and the unmilitary character of French civilisation. The thought of revenge for the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1870 had largely died out ; France wished only to be let alone. The increase in 1913 of the term of compulsory military service, from two years to three, was due to the increasing signs of German aggressiveness ; and as it was, the " law of three years " was passed only after a campaign

(1) Declaration made May 18, 1916. This false statement, corrected after two years, was made use of officially by the German ambassador at Brussels, August 2/3, 1914, by the German ambassador in Paris on August 3, and by the Chancellor in the Reichstag on August 4. The declaration that French troops had crossed the Belgian border was equally false.

which threatened to disrupt the country, so violent was the opposition of a pacific people to any increase in the military burden.

Can we blame France for resisting invasion and for keeping faith with Russia?

Russia took up arms in defense of a small State of kindred race, Serbia, and this only after making the suggestion that the Austrian demands be arbitrated. These demands, accepted by Serbia to the point of national humiliation, would have annihilated Serbian sovereignty; they were based upon the unproved charge of Serbian official complicity in the murder of the Austrian crown prince.

Can we blame Russia, a great State, for championing Serbia, a small one, of kindred race, whose existence was unrighteously threatened? Did we have equal justification for entering the lists against Spain in the interest of Cuba?

It results that the immediate causes of the war were the Austrian humiliation of Serbia and the German violation of Belgium. We have here the first indication of the fuller conclusion that Austro-German forces of aggression and conquest forced the war upon Europe. Germany could have avoided war by adopting any one of three courses: by counselling Austria to accept the adequate concessions of Serbia, by agreeing to the Czar's suggestion of arbitration, or by accepting Sir Edward Grey's proposal of a conference of the interested powers. Rejecting all three of these courses, Germany declared war upon Russia, and then on the basis of false charges, upon France. Later on, Belgium, the innocent victim, was charged on the most absurd evidence—now thoroughly exploded—with having violated her own pledge of neutrality.

We cannot avoid the conclusion, therefore, that the present war with all its horrors is actually due to Germany. But for the two initial crimes committed against the liberty and integrity of small States, the Allied armies would not be to-day in the field.

But one may say that there are deeper causes, that Germany and Austria represented a type of culture and a theory of government, which were bound to bring them into collision, sooner or later, with the other powers of Europe. This is the contention of many German writers. It is undoubtedly true. On further study, we find ourselves compelled to view the present war as a conflict of human and cultural forces acting through different forms of government. But, far from freeing the Germanic Empires from the responsibility for this war, this only fixes it more firmly upon them, for it shows the absolute necessity the enemies of imperialism and militarism were under—in this case, as always—of resisting to the death the aggressions of such powers. The struggle thus becomes the most typical and tragic contest in the history of human liberty.

## III.—THE WAR AND THE UNITED STATES

The American State, founded in democratic freedom, under traditions received from England and France, has never had to vindicate its liberties against foreign aggression; it fought for them once for all in the Revolution, aided by France. But it has exercised its moral influence and put forth its military force to defend the liberties of other States which were oppressed or threatened. What is its duty now?

Never in our history have the forces of aggression and dominance of autocratic government shown such efficiency, brutality and "will-to-power" as in the Germanic Empires

of to-day. German writers, in theory, and German soldiers in practice, agree in reasserting certain old claims long since exposed—claims which have made the scenes of the struggles for liberty charnel-houses of heroic patriotism and valour. The "divine right of Kings," the mission of a "chosen people," the "right of might" by which a powerful nation, invoking the biological law of "natural selection," crushes its feeble neighbour, the pretension to be the "superman" and the "super-state" exempt from the obligations of ordinary morality, the assertion that "military necessity" justifies moral wrong—these are some of the unblushing claims put forth by the German military State.

In practice we see these claims made good. The treaty guaranteeing neutrality becomes a "scrap of paper", the oath of allegiance is the screen for intrigue, the passport is the means of espionage and forgery, the conventions of the Hague are targets for irony as the hospital ships they are intended to protect are the targets of gun and torpedo fire, diplomacy is a system of subterfuge, dishonour on the battlefield as in the cabinet is justified as means to the end of the spread of pan-Germanic culture. We see clearly what the "master-morality" of Germany means and the sort of "culture" it seeks to impose upon the free nations of Europe.

This, fellow-Americans, is not mere hear-say or unconfirmed report. Our Government itself, in spite of its policy of careful neutrality, has been forced to recognise the real character of German aims and methods; for the United States has been made the theatre in which these aims and methods have been exploited. We need no further proof of German diplomatic duplicity after the revelations which led to the dismissal of von Papen and Boy-Ed, we need no further proof of German barbarity and cruelty on the battlefield and in the ravaged cities of Belgium and France, after the submarine assaults upon passenger and hospital ships. The explosion of German bombs on American territory and on innocent merchantmen leaving American ports is enough to open our ears and consciences to the muffled noises which betoken the destruction of churches and ambulances in Europe. That we need no further evidence as to the sort of enemy the free nations of Europe are fighting may be judged from the words penned by the President in his note of last April to the Imperial German Government demanding the cessation of submarine warfare against passenger ships. He convicts the German Government not only of crimes of the most brutal inhumanity, but of violation of its pledged word and of deliberate lying in the matter of the *Sussex*. Caught red-handed the Imperial Government admitted this last charge.

The platforms of both the political parties agree in exposing the traiterous and baneful activities of the Germans in the United States. This is what the Germans do in a country with which they are at peace; imagine their methods in Belgium and Serbia, where they are free to exploit their "culture" without restraint. Written by their own agents, in letters found on prisoners and in official proclamations and military orders, the record is one of sickening and unspeakable savagery.

## IV.—CONCLUSION

This then is the spectacle presented to us. We see a gigantic military autocracy, beside which the armies of the past were mere toys, forcing its system and its rule upon the most free and democratic peoples of Europe. Its preparation has been complete, its science is unrivalled, its organisation and solidarity perfect. Do we realise that this power

has grown to its present stature by a series of wars of conquest; that it has already in this war crushed out the life of no less than three small and flourishing States, Belgium, Serbia and Montenegro, besides devastating again its old victim, Poland; that the sinister Turks are its tools in Armenia and through the Orient; that if the war should end in the *status quo* of to-day all these peoples and territories would be subject permanently—and with them large portions of republican France and liberalized Russia—the birthland of the Hague Conference—to the rule of the Hohenzollern House which represents and imposes this theory of government and this form of culture? What would be the limits and results of the next war when a victorious or unconquered Germany saw fit to declare it? Can we believe that her submarines would visit American ports only for purposes of commerce? It is in our own interest, as it is in the interest of public right, that the power of Germany should be broken or reduced.

The humiliating attitude of neutrality is therefore unworthy of us. Our sympathies should be open and pronounced for those who defend what we approve and love. Our fathers died for the democratic liberty in which we live to-day; and the cause of Washington has become the world-cause for which the Allies are making the extremest sacrifices. Those who die for this liberty to-day will pass it on to our children of to-morrow. We were in the van-guard of liberty; now that the main hosts of democracy are engaged, how can we remain indifferent?

We are called upon to forward the consummation of an alliance of wills, if not of States, with the other enlightened Powers, in the interests of democratic liberty and international right.

Let us tell them plainly then—the Nations Allied in this struggle—of our desire to aid in the triumph of the cause which has always been ours, but which in this crises, our Government, declaring that the war does not concern us, has failed to serve.

Let us tell our Government that it must, if it would live, revive the high traditions of honour and action which have made our nation great.

We must have a government which will take the lead among the neutral nations, standing for the inflexible enforcement of international agreements, and for the vindication at any cost—not merely by verbal threats—of the elementary principles of humanity.

Let us choose such a government; let us tolerate no other.

Let us tell our fellow-citizens everywhere that this war *does* concern us, that it affects our deepest interests and involves the vital principles of our political life.

Note the generous action of a sister American Republic. In July 1916, the Brazilian Congress adopted in both Houses the discourse pronounced by the Ambassador Ruy Barbosa, its official delegate to the celebration of Argentine Independence held at Buenos Aires. The motions to adopt this discourse, as the official pronouncement of Brazil, were made by men of opposing political parties. This pronouncement was described, in an official French parliamentary note of appreciation, as making the day of its passage "a historic date." The following words are from this discourse :—

" It is not allowed to neutrals to reward by their abstention those who have planned this aggression. As between those who destroy the law and those who observe it, no neutrality is admissible. The tribunals of public opinion and conscience cannot rest neutral between law and crime. "

We did not take this initiative, but we can follow this example. We did not create the "historic date," but we can make the date doubly historic. Let us adopt these words and do our utmost to enforce them—everyone of us who loves his country and believes in the principles of American Independence.

*Signed:* *October 17th, 1916.*

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